

Albinism in Malawi project



Albinism is an inherited condition where there is little pigment produced in the skin, hair and eyes. This results in poor vision and skin that is extremely sensitive to the damaging effects of the sun

Dr Patricia Lund, Coventry University, UK (see profile [here](#)) p.lund@coventry.ac.uk

Bonface Massah (Executive Director of the Association of People with Albinism in Malawi)

Edgar Nyirenda (scriptwriter in Malawi)

Outputs of this albinism project are freely available via Coventry University's online repository [here](#).

Supported by Coventry University, an Innovation Fund grant from Sightsavers UK (described [here](#)) and several UK charities.

In this project we aim to use radio drama to

- highlight and address the barriers to education often experienced by those with albinism and
- showcase low cost interventions that can enhance the classroom experience and lives of those with this inherited condition.

A report on the development of this radio drama is available [here](#).

Below are outlines of the first four episodes of this drama, called LOVE BUILDS.

Episode 1

The myths and beliefs about children with albinism in Malawi and other parts of Africa are challenged in this brief and passionate plea for love, togetherness, inclusion and understanding.

Albinism is an inherited condition where there is little pigment produced in the skin, hair and eyes. Madalo is a 9-year-old girl with albinism. Her quest for education is challenged when she faces stigma and inadequate support from peers and society. Mr. Zgambo, a new teacher at her school, is convinced that teachers, pupils and society can do better to address her needs. He believes LOVE BUILDS.

Episode 2

Building on the tone set by episode 1, episode 2 continues to challenge the myths and misconceptions about albinism in Malawi and other parts of Africa.

Madalo has for the moment surmounted the challenges that she faces at school and in her community, and it is clear that she is heading for a successful future. She becomes a model for the listener on how people with albinism are able to socialize normally, emphasizing the crucial element of appropriate dressing to ensure skin and eye protection. The story shows how supportive teachers and parents can together effectively contribute to the well-being of pupils with albinism by mentoring and paying close attention to their needs.

Episode 2 introduces a 14-year-old boy named Bright who has albinism. He is an orphaned street kid who has a talent in music which he exploits to beg from passersby for his survival. Miriam, Madalo's mother, hears Bright singing one day and takes a special interest in the boy. However, this does not go well on another occasion when she meets Bright while in the company of her boyfriend, Kondwani. There is a row between the two lovers which further shows the deep-rooted myths about albinism even among adults and educated people. This row leads to a temporary break in their relationship.

While bedding down at a street corner at night, Bright is attacked by a thug who steals the money that passers-by have given him. Although Bright is hurt, he is saved by three strangers who are to become an important part of his new story. One is Miriam, who will become his adopted mother.

Episode 3

This episode highlights how widespread ignorance about the cause of albinism leads to wrong decisions and wrong practices. It counters such ignorance by using positive characters to bring out the truth about albinism.

Bright is informally adopted by Miriam and is kindly welcomed into the family. Through a flashback of the events that occurred after Bright's birth, the episode shows how the cause of albinism is generally misunderstood and how this eventually leads to social and psychological disturbance of those affected.

A commonly-held myth about the cause of albinism is uncovered when Naliyera brings pressure to bear on her pregnant colleague Nachilenje. She instructs Nachilenje to close her eyes for fear that sight of the passing schoolchildren with albinism, Bright and Madalo, will lead her to give birth to a baby with albinism. Naliyera is immediately corrected by Nachilenje, who knows the true, hereditary cause of albinism.

On Bright's first day at Njalale school, Mr. Zgambo and Mrs. Namba illustrate how teachers can introduce new students with albinism in schools in a way that encourages acceptance and inclusion by their schoolmates.

Taking us to the town where Kondwani is attempting to repair his relationship with Miriam, the story introduces Luso, a medical student and nephew to Kondwani. While Kondwani's relationship with Miriam is on the edge of a cliff due to their previous heated argument over albinism, Luso is making subtle and clever efforts to bring them together. Over a lunch table, Luso engages with his uncle using rational arguments to dispel the wrong beliefs he holds about albinism, at the same time informing the listener.

However, back at Njalale school, trouble from the community seems to stand in the way of progress. Naliyera comes to the school's office and demands the immediate transfer of her children because she wrongly believes that they will contract albinism from the two pupils with albinism at the school. When the head teacher tries to put her right and denies her the transfer letters, she leaves the school fuming, claiming absolute rights over her own children.

Meanwhile in the classroom, Bright's friends have not yet come to terms with albinism and in the absence of the teacher, Bright feels isolated and scorned. Feeling miserable, Bright leaves the classroom, runs to his teachers and tells them that he wants to quit the school.

Episode 4

This episode conveys vital information on how to end discrimination against people with albinism and continues to address widely-held myths and beliefs.

The teachers Mr. Zgambo and Mrs. Namba try to convince Bright to reverse his decision to quit school after receiving a poor reception by his classmates. Although Bright is hesitant at first, it later becomes clear to him that he *can* overcome the challenges he faces and still excel in school, by learning from the experience of his friend Madalo.

In a conversation between Luso, Miriam and Kondwani, Luso helps his uncle to restore his relationship with Miriam. The dialogue introduces the hereditary nature of albinism and counters mistaken beliefs about its origins that are rooted in superstition. For Miriam and Kondwani, the revelation that they may be personally affected by albinism comes as a shock. As albinism is in both their families they realise they could have a baby with albinism if they get together as a couple.

The episode promotes teacher support in combating negative attitudes to albinism in schools and communities. Worried that Naliyera's children are not attending school because their mother erroneously fears that they will contract albinism, Mrs. Namba visits Naliyera's compound and tries to convince her that albinism is not contagious and that her children should return to school. She stresses that that all children should enjoy inclusive education. Naliyera is not convinced and remains angry.

In their continuing effort to end discrimination against albinism and promote inclusive education at their school, Mrs. Namba and Mr. Zamba appeal for community leadership support from the village chief Njalale. He responds positively to their request and meets

Madalo and Bright in the school's office to encourage them in their studies and assure them of support. He also promises to help prejudiced characters like Naliyera to understand the truth about albinism.

Soon after the Chief has dismissed Madalo and Bright, Naliyera bursts into the office in a panic. Her children have gone missing and she begs the school to help her look for them, even though she has refused to allow them to attend Njalale school because it accommodates pupils with albinism. Will the school authorities help her?

Further episodes

We have funding for a further two episodes and hope this series will continue.

Broadcasts

These episodes will be broadcast in both English and Chichewa in Malawi.